

"THE STORY OF OUR LIVES FROM YEAR TO YEAR"

ALL THE YEAR ROUND

A Weekly Journal
CONDUCTED BY
CHARLES DICKENS

NO. 1041. NEW SERIES.

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 10, 1888.

PRICE TWOPENCE.

AT THE MOMENT OF VICTORY.

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CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE other half of a great love is a great humility. Great love knows nothing of self-seeking, self-justification, nor of that miserable plea which little love is so apt to set up, "half my transgression must lie at your door."

Madge's love for Lance, measured by her humility, must have been great indeed. No word of self-justification, from first to last, ever escaped her lips. Not once did she set up, as she very well might have done, the plea "I did it for Lance." In good truth she felt she had done so badly for the man she loved, that the less she said about it the better. Even what she had purposed she had failed to perform, either through too little courage, or too much conscience. She had put out her hand, as it were, to stop the wheels of fate—with this only result, that her fingers had been crushed in her weak endeavour.

For a day or two she kept her room, dispensing, however, with the doctor's attendance and seeing not a soul but her maid. When she once more joined the family circle she looked literally the ghost of her old bright self. She had never learned the art of the economy of the emotions, and sooner or later her sensitive, passionate nature seemed bound to wear out the slight frame that held it. Sir Peter stood looking at her aghast as she sat under multitudinous wraps shivering beside a huge fire. Her voice, too, as she answered his greeting, thrilled him as the touch of a dead hand might; it was cold,

tuneless, far-away, the sort of voice that one lying at the gates of death, and only saved by a miracle from passing through them, might be supposed to bring back to life with him.

Sir Peter fussed a good deal over her that day, suggested all sorts of plans for bringing back the roses to her cheeks, ran over a list of German Bads and Swiss Spas as desirable places for her to winter in. Madge listened to him quietly.

"I have made up my mind where to go," she answered, "it will be to Seville—I hope to get away next week."

Sir Peter was all astonishment; his questions came in a string.

Madge put them on one side, unanswered. It would have been difficult to make him see, in the fact of there being at Seville a convent ruled by an Abbess with whom Madge had some slight acquaintance, a sufficient reason for her choice of that city as a place of abode. Yet such was the case. In that convent Madge saw a refuge from the terrors of her conscience, which conjured out of every dark corner the face or the form of the woman she believed she had driven to her death. Atonement for this was denied her; but penance still lay in her power, and penance she eagerly grasped at, even though it might involve the necessity of the abandonment of the faith of her childhood.

This Spanish convent was one of the strictest of its order, and Madge knew well enough what rigorous discipline would be included in a life of penitence within its walls. But what matter, if it did hurry her a little faster out of the world than she felt herself going already? Her purpose was fixed, never again in this life to meet the look of Lance's wrathful eyes. The greatest kindness she could confer on

him, and on all her friends, now, it seemed to her, would be, without any fuss of leaving, to creep quietly out of life. And if, as she made her way towards the dark valley, she could lose the sense of that pursuing shape which filled her days with terror and rendered her nights so many waking nightmares, she would feel that Heaven had bestowed a blessing upon her such as she had no right to demand.

Madge did something else besides expedite her departure for Spain—she sent for a lawyer from Carstairs and gave to him full instructions for the making of a will which assigned to Lance the whole of the property she had a right to leave away from the Cohen family.

Sir Peter had to be let into the secret of this will, in order that his consent to act as executor to it might be obtained.

He fussed a good deal over the affair, there seemed a gloom and a mystery about Madge's doings just then, which acted like a douche of cold water on the bright little fire of hope, which he was perpetually trying to stir into a flame. It was not easy for him to discard his lifelong habit of looking at the cheerful side of things; at the same time, he was bound to admit that there seemed little enough just then upon which to build his cheerfulness.

Wet, wintry weather set in; and the old gentleman felt that little by little his cheerfulness was, as it were, slipping through his fingers.

"If I could but smoke, it would be something to do," he sighed, looking out drearily from successive windows at the dismal landscape of mountains, half-hidden in mist, leaden sky pouring down rain in sheets, woods already half-stripped of their foliage.

He furtively repeated his juvenile efforts to master the mysteries of tobacco; was compelled to abandon them for reasons which had obtained in his youthful days; and was driven to find other outlets for his energies.

He went about the house ordering big fires to be made wherever there chanced to be a vacant fireplace; sent for a man from Carstairs, and another from Edinburgh, to supply him with plans for increasing the heating apparatus of the corridors and larger rooms. Lady Judith, debarred from her outdoor pastoral amusements, added not a little to his discomfiture by generally superintending his occupations. She complained loudly of the extra

warmth he was putting into the house, armed herself with a huge fire-screen in lieu of a fan, and informed everybody on every possible opportunity that she "suffered so from the heat."

The letter received from Lance, written in a railway-carriage on his way to Marseilles, did not mend matters. Madge's name was not so much as mentioned in it; in fact, it seemed written for the whole and sole purpose of saying that he had forgotten to say what a rascal Stubbs was, and that he hoped Sir Peter would get rid of him as soon as possible; the man he was certain had been playing a double game, and he would "stake his life"—these were Lance's words—"that there was no foundation, in fact, for the evil suspicion he had chosen to fasten upon a young lady who was an utter stranger to him."

Lance in this letter said not a word as to his plans, so Sir Peter naturally concluded that they remained unaltered. A second letter, however, which arrived two days after—when they imagined him to be tossing about on the Mediterranean—showed that these plans had been completely reversed. It was a hasty line, written in pencil, during the railway journey back from Marseilles. In it Lance explained the reason for this return journey. The conviction of Stubbs's rascality had been gradually gaining ground in his mind, he said, and now had taken such hold of him, that, before setting off for Corsica, he thought it wiser to run over to Liverpool and thoroughly test the man's statements as to what had taken place there. He would himself see and question the local authorities, whose names Stubbs had used so freely; and he could now only wonder over his own and Sir Peter's simplicity in not having adopted such a course before.

It was possible that Stubbs's elaborate accounts of his interview with the municipal and cemetery authorities at Liverpool might be equally unworthy of belief; no one had been at pains to verify them.

As for the empty purse; the envelope with the name, Jane Shore, upon it; and the handkerchief, any one might produce the two first and assign them to any one he pleased; and the last, the handkerchief, could be easily obtainable by a man who would hunt through waste-paper baskets, and listen at keyholes.

If in any way, he added, he found his

suspicious of Stubbs verified, he would at once place the matter in the hands of the police. He supposed Sir Peter would have no objection to his doing this. In conclusion, he gave an address to which letters might be sent, and begged Sir Peter to consider his communication as strictly confidential, "for," he added, "if the rascal gets an idea that he is suspected, no doubt he will be off at once."

Sir Peter felt his head go round. The man he had trusted with his private correspondence, his cash-book, his cheque-book, to turn out a rascal! In his heart, the old gentleman did not object to a spice of roguery in his protégés—it added, so to speak, a piquancy to the exercise of his benevolence. This that Lance charged Stubbs with, however, was downright villainy, which, instead of adding piquancy to his benevolence, took the flavour out of it altogether.

It seemed past belief, yet it was not easy to shake off the impression which Lance's strongly-expressed opinions had made upon him. It was altogether bewildering. The worst part was having to keep the whole thing a secret. He would do his best; but still, if it should ooze out that his faith in his late secretary had had a severe shock—well, he dared say no very great harm would be done after all.

He could not resist the temptation of hinting to Madge that possibly it might be as well to reconsider the appointment of Stubbs to the land-stewardship at Redesdale.

Madge turned away wearily from the subject.

"The lawyers will see after that," she said. "Let him go. I don't want even to think of him."

In good truth to her—with the thoughts she had in her heart at that moment—Stubbs and his rascality seemed to be of colossal insignificance.

It may reasonably be doubted whether Sir Peter's power of keeping a secret would have stood the strain put upon it had not a second letter arrived which, for the moment, threw Lance's communication into the shade.

It was received two days before the day which Madge had fixed for her departure to the South. She had spent the morning with Sir Peter at his writing-table, going through various matters connected with her Durham property, in the management of which Sir Peter had promised to be her representative during her absence.

"Of course, my dear, I'll do my best in your affairs," he said, "but my hands, as you know, are very full just now!"

They were literally very full at the moment with the unopened letters which the morning's post had brought him.

To emphasize his statement, he began breaking seals and opening envelopes very fast, keeping up a light flow of talk as he did so.

"Better open this first," he soliloquised, fingering a black-edged envelope; "dare say it's from a widow with six or seven children, whom she wants to place out in life or get into schools."

Madge, looking down on the envelope which he threw on the table, recognised the handwriting of the Rev. Joshua Parker.

"Eh! What's this?" cried Sir Peter, dropping his letter and turning a startled, white face towards Madge. "Read it, my dear, read it—I don't seem able to take it in."

Madge picked up the letter and read a few short lines from the Rev. Joshua Parker, enclosing, with many regrets, a letter which the Australian mail had just brought to him. It was from the Wesleyan minister who had succeeded him in his charge at Rutland Bay, and after a brief preamble on the duty of resignation to the will of Heaven, told the sad news of the death of Gervase Critchett, of colonial fever, within a month of the departure of the Rev. Joshua Parker from the colony. Full details, the writer stated, would be sent by the next mail.

Sir Peter rubbed his forehead. "I'm all in a maze," he said; "I get a nephew one mail, I lose him the next! I can't realise it, eh, Madge."

Madge said nothing. She realised it sharply enough, and with it realised something else also, that all her careful thought for Lance, her plotting and subterfuges, had been after all but so much winnowing of the wind and ploughing of the ocean.

CONFESSIONS OF AN EXTENSION LECTURER.

"Would you like to extend?" said Jones of Saint Boniface, as he rushed into my rooms one morning while I was consuming my frugal breakfast, and wondering why Snawkey, who had only scraped into a Third, managed to get twenty pupils, while I, with all the blushing honours of a First, only mustered three and a half—the

half being a "Tosher," or, in the words of the University Statutes, a non-collegiate student, who could only afford to come for half-hours, and pay half-fees. To Jones' enigmatical question I promptly replied that there were at least three things I should like to extend—my purse, my coaching connection, and my credit with the tailor, and begged him to explain himself further. Whereupon, he took upon himself to explore my half-empty cigar-box, and having thoughtfully selected a weed and cautiously lit it, to expound the full meaning of the novel and mysterious phrase he had employed. He began by pointing out that in the economy of the University I had really no place. I had, it is true, got a First in the Schools; but he went on to say, quite unnecessarily, I thought, that there was precious little chance of my ever getting a fellowship, and that the golden age of coaching was past and gone. "In fact," he contended, "the supply of men of your calibre is at present vastly in excess of the demand. Of course, you may take a mastership, or drift up to town; but Oxford has no place for you. It was not very rich in the old days when there were no married fellows; but now, as far as I can see, promotion will be as slow here as it was in the army after Waterloo. We have no such thing as compulsory retirement, half the colleges are suffering from agricultural depression, and obliged to cut down their fellowships, and the rest have been compelled by the Commissioners to endow professorships in all manner of out-of-the-way subjects. Unless a man is a specialist, I don't see that he's much chance in Oxford nowadays."

I ventured to point out that I had heard all this a hundred times before, that I failed to see what it had to do with "extending," and that it was all very well for Jones, who had secured his fellowship just ten days before the latest of University Commissions commenced its operations, and therefore had fixity of tenure for life, to inveigh against the present state of things.

"My dear fellow," he replied, "you are always so impulsive. I merely wished to prove the preamble, as we say in congregation; and having done that, I now proceed to the Statute. The preamble would run thus: 'Whereas it is evident that there are in Oxford a large number of deserving young men—such as Perkins of Brazenface—who have no work to do,

the University exacts as follows!' and then follow the words of the Statute A, to which I beg all attention.

"1. That work and pay must be found for these deserving young men, and especially for Perkins of Brazenface, outside the limits of the University.

"2. That the time has come for the ancient and time-honoured seats of learning to extend the benefits of Higher Connection and University Culture to those who are unable to reside within their precincts!' In other words," as he explained, "if the mountain won't come to Mahomet, Mahomet must go to the mountain."

I was puzzled.

"Well," said Jones, taking pity on my perplexity, "the long and short of the matter is, that it has been decided to appoint lecturers to give courses of lectures in big towns—and, in fact, anywhere where they want lectures, and can get classes together—to hold examinations, and to give certificates, or degrees, or something to those who pass. I've only just heard of it, but I thought it might suit you, and you might send in your name and offer to lecture on something or other."

"It's awfully good of you, old man," I replied; "but, good Heavens! you don't mean to tell me that there are any human beings in England, in this so-called nineteenth century, who will voluntarily attend lectures, and pay for the privilege."

"I do most emphatically say so," he rejoined. "Why, man, you are arguing from the experience of four years' compulsory college lectures; but remember that these happy individuals have never been obliged to attend a single lecture in their lives, and that they are hungering and thirsting after Oxford culture. I don't mean to say," he added, with a shudder, "that even they would stand such things as Fargie on the Articles, or Cheadle on Logic. But give them something popular, attractive, and high-sounding, and depend upon it they'll come in their thousands. This is the sort of thing they want," he continued, waxing eloquent, with his theme and his quotations: 'The great Word-Painters of England!' 'Man and his Environment!' 'The Master-builders of the Constitution!' 'The Evolution of the Drama!' 'The Message of the Ages!' Why, the thing will be a gigantic success if it's only properly worked. Avoid commonplace; startle them; give them all the latest ideas in the newest words, and it's bound to draw. Yes, the thing can be

done, and Perkins of Brazenface is the man to do it."

Though I by no means shared my friend Jones's enthusiastic anticipations, yet before he left my rooms I had sent in a formal application to the Delegates for a place on the staff of University Extension Lecturers, and therewith a rough draft of suggested courses of lectures. It was with mingled feelings of pleasure and of misgiving that I received, some ten days after, a polite note from the Secretary to the Delegacy, informing me that I had been appointed, and that I was to lecture during the next three months at five different places—centres he called them—on five different subjects.

The interval between the receipt of this letter and my first lecture passed all too rapidly. The greater part of my time was spent in the Bodleian and the Taylorian, in looking through any and every book that bore on the subjects I had rashly undertaken, taking this fact from one authority, that theory from another, and phrases and expressions from writers old and new, till I had a perfect mosaic fitted together with cement of my own.

I am not going to say anything about my first courses. Looking back at them after the experience of some years, I am afraid they were failures, though fortunately there were few among the audiences who knew enough to detect my blunders. I fear they must have learnt many strange things, but I had the stamp of the University of Oxford upon me, and every one knew that in these days the old-fashioned ideas must be upset, and that the world expects at least one new theory a week.

Of the novelty of my views I do not think they had a right to complain. I proved that Fielding was greater as a dramatist than as a novelist; I restored Yalden and Pye to their places amongst the great poets of England; I demonstrated that Napoleon was a very inferior General, and that the French Revolution was the work of Madame du Barry. I exploded the theories of Darwin and of Lyell, and constructed an entirely novel science of political economy, which ridiculed free trade and fair trade; ignored Adam Smith, and poured contempt on Ricardo and his theory of rent. "*De l'audace, et encore de l'audace, et toujours de l'audace*" was my motto, and I doubt whether a popular lecturer could select a better.

The result, at all events, was eminently satisfactory. I found myself

greatly in request. The local papers published my lectures, though I am afraid the zeal of the reporters was usually considerably in excess of their knowledge, and many a fierce controversy raged round some theory which I had wantonly broached. Not but what I was sometimes taken at a disadvantage. The scheme of the Extension Delegates provided that there should be a certain time given after the lecture was over for any of the audience who pleased to ask questions, discuss doubtful points, and, in fact, generally to heckle the lecturer. This was a part of the programme which I must own I did not generally relish; but it was all in the day's work, and had to be got through somehow.

It was in vain that I protested to the Delegates that this cross-examination was beneath the dignity of a University Lecturer; that it tended to lower him to the level of a Parliamentary candidate at a contested election; and that if it was applied to College lectures its practice would be attended by the most lamentable results. I was informed by the secretary that the Delegates were unable to concur in my opinion, as they considered that the questioning of the lecturer was almost the most valuable part of the course. There was nothing for it but to turn the situation by delicate manoeuvres, for though I was perfectly willing to discuss anything with any one for as long as he liked, I was not going to stand up in the Town Hall of Cinderton, or the Assembly Rooms at Spaborough, to be made the mark for scorners' questions. Fortunately I found that in the majority of cases there was little desire to catechise the lecturer, probably his hearers had quite enough of him during the hour's lecture, or they were too diffident to get up in a crowded room and raise their voices loud enough to reach the platform. By another merciful dispensation it soon appeared that the people who did ask questions were generally the most ignorant; and it required very little dexterity to turn the tables on them. The simplest way was to question the questioner, or when this failed, to give an answer as enigmatical and long-winded as could be given by a diplomatic Under-Secretary to a Parliamentary question. Still, I have been in tight corners before now, owing to this most iniquitous custom. It was not exactly pleasant for me when, after a very brilliant lecture on the Peninsular War, old General MacPhussey got up and en-

quired what I meant by "a flank movement to the rear," and whether I imagined that a siege-train had any connection with a locomotive; nor did I consider it kind of Mr. Gringle, F.G.S., to get up and denounce me because in my remarkably popular course on Man and his Environment, I had spoken of the mammoth as "one of the most portentous life-forms of that primordial period when neolithic man was building the chasm between the ages of bronze and of iron." I am sure it sounds all right, and has more than once evoked cheers; and it was hardly likely I was going to alter one of my favourite phrases because it did not fit in with Mr. Gringle's geologic hypotheses. Knowing that he was decidedly unpopular at Bovintor, where the incident occurred, I ventured to tell him as much in pretty straightforward terms, and though he filled some columns of the local paper with diatribes against my portentous and pretentious ignorance, I quite thought I got the better of him. The way in which he revenged himself was really too mean to be related in detail; suffice to say that at the request of the Delegates, who said they had been in communication with the Professor of Geology, my course on "Man and his Environment" was withdrawn from the list of lectures that I was prepared to give.

I have had other passages of arms; but in most of them I think, without vanity, I may claim to have come off victorious. I have been tackled by Anglo-Israelites, Christian Socialists, Baconians, vegetarians, by gentlemen who believed that the earth was flat, and ladies who were convinced that Napoleon was the Beast. I have been regarded as a rank Tory, as a red-hot Radical, as a dangerous Neologian, and as a Jesuit in disguise; but I do not feel I am outraging my innate modesty when I say that the horny-handed sons of toil almost invariably regarded me as "t' chaap wi' the biggest lot o' long words a ever 'eard," while the fair sex were wont to designate me "a gifted being."

I have suffered much, very much, from chairmen, as what public man has not? Indeed, I have often thought of starting a "Chairman-Abolition Society," with myself as secretary, and I believe it would be a great success. We should get the support of every Member of Parliament to begin with, and I know of not a few Boards, and Committees, and Societies, where the abolition of the chairman would be re-

garded with unqualified pleasure. The custom that prevailed in most places where I lectured was to have a different chairman for each lecture. We usually began with the Mayor; then followed the Vicar or some Cathedral dignitary; then—for we were strictly unsectarian—the Rev. Father O'Kelly or the Rev. Uriah Ragge; while for the rest of the course we had to be content with an Alderman, or a local doctor or lawyer. Each and all of these worthies thought it necessary to indulge in a speech on introducing the lecturer, in which the benefits conferred by the University on the town, and the town on the University, were dwelt upon; the unhappy lecturer was metaphorically, sometimes literally as well, patted on the back; his youth was not infrequently made the subject of an ill-timed jest; and he was congratulated on having the privilege of addressing such an audience.

I have had chairmen who have given an hour's lecture themselves before I was allowed to say a word. It was at a lecture of mine on "Health and Wealth," that Alderman Cargile thought fit to treat the élite of Slumberton to a minute and detailed account of the new drainage works. I have lost innumerable trains owing to the practice which prevailed at certain centres of solemnly moving and seconding a vote of thanks to the chairman and lecturer, at the close of each lecture.

Stokeville is a bright spot in this dreary wilderness of chairmen. I was informed that the chair would be taken at the first lecture by the Worshipful the Mayor, and I resigned myself to the usual infliction. But I did that worthy and worshipful man a gross injustice, for he turned out to be one of the most sensible chairmen I ever met with.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he said, "you have come to hear a Oxford schollard, and you don't want to hear me. All I asks is, don't you move a vote of thanks to me at the end, as I wants to be off as soon as this gentleman has finished his say."

The audience, I am rejoiced to add, showed their appreciation of the Mayor's conduct by voting him perpetual chairman, and the thanks we gave him at the conclusion of the course were as honest as they were cordial.

Of the hospitality that was everywhere extended to me, I have the most grateful recollection. There was quite a contest in many places as to who should have the privilege of entertaining me, and I was

*Lecture
popular
and
successful*

really afraid more than once that I should be torn in pieces by angry claimants. I made many warm friends during my peregrinations, and received hints from at least two fathers of families that I might do worse than settle down in their particular town, and that they did not fancy I need look very far to find a suitable wife. This was rather embarrassing, but not so much so as the receipt one morning of a lengthy epistle, in what would I believe be correctly described as a fine Italian hand, from one of my audience at Great Blowford. As the letter was marked, "Strictly Private and Confidential," I do not feel justified in disclosing its contents. It is enough to say that the concoction of a reply, in which I firmly but kindly declined the proposal, caused me far more trouble than the preparation of a course of lectures.

Perhaps I ought to attribute my popularity, in some degree, to a very simple stratagem. It was part of the scheme of the Delegates that the "students attending the lectures should be encouraged to write answers to questions bearing on the lectures;" and the lecturers were instructed to set questions at the end of each lecture; to receive the answers; look over them, and make such notes or remarks upon them as they might think fit. At first I honestly endeavoured to grapple with these weekly batches of papers, but experience soon taught me the impossibility of the task. I was lecturing every day. I travelled on the average a hundred and twenty miles daily, and no human being could, in addition to this, be expected to look over three hundred and fifty papers a week. The shortest way was to compile a vocabulary of flattering and complimentary phrases, and inscribe these on the various papers sent in. The result I found to be equally satisfactory to lecturer and pupils; it was, indeed, twice blessed, for it saved me immeasurable trouble, and caused universal gratification. For Miss Jane Simpson to read that her paper was "highly meritorious, showing originality of thought and remarkable power of expression," was surely far more pleasing than if I had gone through her answers with the most scrupulous care, correcting all her blunders in spelling and grammar, and under-scoring all her mistakes. I feel sure that young Frank Mills invoked blessings on my head when he was able to show his delighted parent, Mr. Jacob Mills, town councillor and hatter of Southminster, his paper of an-

swers, on the "Epoch-makers of Europe," endorsed: "Most satisfactory. Gives proof of diligent study and considerable mental powers."

I can honestly say that I never met with the least complaint after I adopted this admirable system, and can strongly recommend it to my successors in the Extension field.

The worst feature to my mind about this peripatetic lecturing was the long railway journeys it entailed, and the tedious delays at stations. I venture to say that the time I spent at railway junctions would have sufficed to have mastered the elements of the most difficult of foreign languages. They are emphatically places where nothing can be done. You may, if the weather be fine, take a walk in the town or village; but, as a rule, railway companies seem to have chosen about the most uninteresting spots in the kingdom for their junctions. There is generally nothing to see but rows and rows of brick-built cottages, and you are continually haunted by the fear of getting back to the station too late for the train, or of finding that your luggage, with the precious manuscript of your lecture, has been taken possession of by some enterprising fellow-traveller.

There are many people, too, who might object to the uncertainty that the Extension Lecturer feels with regard to the hours of his meals. I have had what I was forced to consider my dinner, at all hours from half-past twelve to half-past ten, and on occasions, I have had to go without dinner altogether. I have had my lot cast among abhorers of what they are pleased to term intoxicating liquors; I have been the guest of vegetarians; and one memorable Ash Wednesday I had the privilege of sharing the fast of the Rev. Allan Jonsone, of Saint Gregory's, Fussington.

I cannot help thinking that I must have sometimes given the impression that I was too ethereal a being to require ordinary sustenance, and the idea that I was positively dying for a pipe and a whisky-and-potass did not seem possible, I am sure, to many of my hosts. It would have been fatal to have dispelled the illusion, and I have had to go many a time hungry, pipeless, and drinkless to bed.

I have had my misadventures, which seemed terribly serious at the time, but which are now not unpleasant to remember. I can recall my disgust at finding myself whirled in an express train, at

about sixty miles, past Little Pottington, where an eager crowd waited in vain for the lecturer's arrival. I can see myself arriving at Pottleborough, and seeking in vain for the local secretary, Mr. Clumber, to whom I had been referred; my wonder at hearing that there was no such person known in all the town; and my chagrin at finding that I had mistaken Pottleborough for Pottlebury, a town some thirty-five miles distant. I have no agreeable recollection of Dulham, where I lectured in the Assembly Room at the King's Head, out of which a public billiard-room opened, and while in the middle of declaiming the most pathetic passage from Adonais, my breathless audience was convulsed into fits of laughter by hearing, "Blue on red, player, green!" in stentorian tones from the neighbouring room.

But the most remarkable experience I ever met with was at Ditchington. I had arranged to lecture there on the "High Priests of Nature"—biographical sketches of Buffon, Cuvier, Darwin, etc.—and my course was to be given in the Corn Exchange, on six consecutive Fridays, at 8 P.M. By some unaccountable accident, I started for that centre of the kid-glove trade on Thursday, under the full impression that that was the day on which I was to lecture. I arrived at the station at 7.45 P.M., and was agreeably surprised to find quite a little crowd assembled to welcome me.

"Mr. Perkins, I presume?" said a woolly-looking gentleman, holding out his hand.

I replied in the affirmative, and was promptly introduced to Mr. Alderman Hooker, Mr. Councillor Glubb, Mr. Widdie, Mr. James Widdie, and "the agent, Mr. Starch." The title of this last gentleman puzzled me, and I believe I made some mild joke about an "agent in advance," which seemed to be hardly understood by the worthy Ditchingtonians.

"I think we had better go straight to the Exchange," said Mr. Alderman Hooker. "Our folks don't like to be kept waiting, and it is a good step from here."

I replied that I was entirely at his disposal, and was quickly driving through the miry streets in the Alderman's bay-roush, as he insisted on calling it. On my way I was somewhat astonished at the interest evidenced in my advent, and the cheers that ever and anon greeted me, not altogether, I regretted to observe, unmingled with groans. I called my companion's attention

to this, but he replied with a chuckle that it was "only natural under the circumstances," and I put it down to the lack of excitement at Ditchington, which led the inhabitants to regard the coming of an Extension Lecturer as quite an event, and appropriated the cheers to myself, and the groans to the Alderman, who I imagined must be personally unpopular. By way of saying something, I enquired if the Mayor would be in the chair. Mr. Hooker stared, and at length burst out into a stentorian laugh:

"Ha! ha! ha! That's a good 'un. Why the Mayor's Tom Bromley; old John Bromley's brother. He take the chair! Oh, Lor'! But never mind, Mr. Perkins, never mind; Steer will show you the map of the country, and you'll soon know who's who. Though it's a wonder," he added, thoughtfully, "as they didn't tell you something about that at the office."

Who old John Bromley was, and why his brother Tom should not take the chair at my lecture, I could not imagine, so for the rest of the journey I drew out the worthy Alderman on the town and trade of Ditchington with considerable success. I learnt of course that it was the hub of the universe, as indeed, according to their own inhabitants, were most places where I lectured, and I was advised to allude to the importance to England of the great kid-glove industry, and the pressing necessity of putting a duty on French and Swedish gloves. This is just the sort of thing I always take care to do. A few judicious words of flattery at once puts the audience on good terms with the lecturer—and with themselves, which is perhaps even more desirable.

The Corn Exchange was reached at last, and I observed a large and not very friendly-looking crowd gathered round the main entrance.

"These are a lot of Bromley's chaps," said the Alderman, glancing rather nervously out of the window; "but never mind, we'll get in by the side door in Cross Street, and of course admission is only by ticket."

We got into the building without much difficulty, and found the Exchange crammed to its utmost capacity almost entirely, I was surprised to see, with men, as at most of my lectures the fair sex were in a decided majority. Our entrance was the signal for a perfect ovation, which I thought it only right to acknowledge by repeated bows. The Alderman took the chair and made a

somewhat lengthy speech, which I was too busy arranging my notes and turning up passages for quotation in my books to pay much heed to. I have some dim recollection of hearing myself described as "one of the most distinguished ornaments of the legal profession," which I thought rather strong, as I had not yet eaten sufficient dinners to be called to the Bar; but I took it in good part, and felt very well satisfied with myself when the Alderman at length sat down, and I rose, amid renewed cheers from the audience, to begin my lecture.

I commenced, as usual, with very flattering references to the town and its trade, and from the way in which my opening remarks were received, I gathered that I had succeeded in making that good impression on my audience which, as I have already said, was always my first object. I then proceeded to the lecture proper, and dwelt, in deeply poetic terms, on the mighty forces of Nature and the secrets which she had kept hid from man for countless ages, but which the giants of science had succeeded, in part at least, in wresting from her.

I was just coming to what I always considered a highly effective passage—in which I contrasted the knowledge possessed by the Board School urchin of to-day with the ignorance of the philosopher of a few centuries ago—when an unexpected incident occurred, which for ever prevented the Ditchingtonians from making the acquaintance of the high priests of Nature. A telegraph boy walked solemnly up the hall and deposited a yellow envelope in the Alderman's hands, remarking, as he did so, in a stage whisper, that perhaps he had better wait to see if there was an answer. The interruption, I was grieved to see, was not altogether unwelcome to my audience, who had received my remarks for the last ten minutes—in fact, ever since I ceased speaking about Ditchington and the glove-trade—with apathetic surprise, if there is such a thing. At all events, they gaped, and yawned, and stared as if they could not make out what on earth I was talking about. My astonishment, however, was unbounded when the chairman, suddenly leaping to his feet, screamed out:

"Why, this is nothing but a sell. Oh, you himpostor, you!" all the while shaking his fist in my face, and only, I verily believe, being restrained from making a violent assault on me by Glubb

and Spencer holding him back by his coat-tails.

"Order, order!" shouted some of the audience, while others very inappropriately called out, "Chair, chair;" and a third party demanded "Read, read."

"Yes, I will read," cried the Alderman, as soon as he had partially regained his composure, "and tell me what you think of this. And you, too, you," glaring at me. "To Alderman Hooker, Corn Exchange, Ditchington. Met with a slight accident this afternoon on leaving the Law Courts. Doctor will not hear of my travelling. Very sorry to disappoint my friends. Please make full apologies. Perkins."

The scene that followed was indescribable, and I believe I was as astonished as any one. Every one seemed shouting at once, "Turn him out." "No, let him go on." "He's an impostor." "A Tory spy." "Hear what he's got to say." Meanwhile the Committee-men on the platform were vainly endeavouring to restore order, and Alderman Hooker was vociferating at the top of his voice, and brandishing the telegram in his hand. I tried in vain to make myself heard, and to explain that I was Perkins, Oxford University Extension Lecturer; that I was not an impostor; and that I had not met with an accident in the Law Courts or anywhere else.

"Confound it all, sir," said Mr. Councillor Glubb, "do you mean to say as you are Perkins, Q.C.—the gent as was to be sent down by the Reform Club to be our candidate against Bromley?"

The murder was out. I could only attempt apologies which I regret to say were not received in very good part by the audience, which I found consisted of the Ditchington United Liberal and Radical Nine Hundred, and make the best of my way to the Red Lion, amid a howling mob, only protected from very unpleasant attentions by a bodyguard of "Bromley's chaps," who were delighted at their opponents' discomfiture.

I fled from Ditchington next morning by the very first train, and have never set foot in the metropolis of the glove-trade since. I received a most angry letter from my distinguished namesake some three months later, in which he attributed his defeat by a majority of seven hundred and sixty to my unpardonable blunder. I did not deem it necessary to reply; but I doubt whether so irascible an individual would have been a fitting member of the House of Commons.

I have now ceased to "extend" and

enjoy a position of greater freedom and less responsibility as Professor of General Literature in University College, Smoke-chester, of which my friend Jones is Principal, and where, we are improving the public mind at a prodigious rate.

SNAILS AND THEIR HOUSES.

THE snail,

Whose tender horns being hit,
Shrinks backward in his shelly cave with pain,
And there, all smother'd up, in shade doth sit,
Long after fearing to creep forth again,

is undoubtedly a well-known, but also, we fear, a somewhat unpopular character. The general opinion concerning him cannot be regarded as a very favourable one, inasmuch as he is looked upon as mischievous and destructive, and hence it is that when fallen in with he is either promptly "scrunched" beneath the heel, or, if the discoverer be not a gardener and have a heart more tender than common, pitched across the wall into the enclosure of one's neighbour. At first sight, therefore, it may seem somewhat of a forlorn hope to attempt to arouse interest in

Ye little snails, with slippery tails,
Who noiselessly travel across the gravel;

yet on the other hand it may be urged, in his behalf, that the snail comes of an ancient race; is by no means lacking in *Vere de Vere*-like repose; and is of peaceful and industrious—some people may think too industrious—habits; besides which we are assured by Monsieur Moquier Tandon, that, despite his apparent apathy, he is by no means lacking in intelligence, but exemplifies the truth of the aphorism that still waters run deep; while Oken goes further, and speaks of "circumspection and foresight, as appearing to characterise the thoughts of the bivalves, mollusca, and snails."

Apart from considerations such as these, snails have some claim upon our attention in that there is not probably a square foot of land, whether cultivated or uncultivated, which is not inhabited by mollusca of some kind, from the big apple snail, "*Helix pomatia*," which sometimes attains the magnitude of one's closed fist, down to the tiny varieties which can only be readily collected by brushing the wet grass with the gauze net of the entomologist. And in addition to all this, there are several kinds which are regarded by many as especially dainty morsels; of these "*Helix pomatia*" might

be regarded as the edible snail "par excellence." He is often found in great abundance in excavating the sites of Roman stations. At Lymne in Kent, Mr. Wright has seen apple snails dug up in masses as large as an ordinary bucket, and completely bedded together; and in France also, their empty shells have been found in great numbers among the ruins of Roman villas. It is well-known that the Romans were very partial to snails as an article of food, and that they fed them, in places called "*cochlearia*," on bran sodden with wine, until they grew to so enormous a size, that their shells could contain eighty pieces of money of the common currency; and we even read of those fattened with such success that they could hold ten quarts. Forty sixpences have been put, with ease, into the shell of the largest British snail, "*Helix pomatia*;" but the story that he was introduced into England by the Romans is erroneous; nor is it probable that he can date his arrival in Britain earlier than the middle of the sixteenth century, when he is said to have been imported as food, or medicine, for a lady who was suffering from consumption. There is no manner of doubt that a diet of apple snails is useful in this disease. An instance is cited some short while before the outbreak of the Crimean War, where a patient who subsequently served therein, was entirely cured by the mucilaginous juice of the "huge, fleshy, and delicious snails," as Evelyn calls them, found near Box Hill, in Surrey, and administered without his knowledge in every conceivable form.

In January, 1758, we find Mrs. Delany writing with reference to a young lady who suffered from a cough at night, recommending two or three snails boiled in her barley-water, as likely to be of service to her. "Taken in time," she adds, "they have done wonderful cures. They give no manner of taste; but she must know nothing of it, and they must be fresh done every two or three days, otherwise they grow too thick."

Pliny also recommends them, beaten up raw and taken in warm water, as a remedy for a cough. As a medicine, snails have been prescribed for other diseases beside consumption. Thus, in a quaint old book entitled, "*A Rich Storehouse or Treasury for the Diseased*," by Master Ralph Bower, we find: "Snails, which bee in shells, beat together with bay-salt and mallows, and laid to the bottomes of your feet and to

the wrists of your hands, before the fit cometh, appeaseth the ague."

They were prescribed also as a plaster for corns, so efficacious as to take them "cleane away within seven days' space;" and in Ireland, a water distilled from snail shells in canary wine, in the month of May, was deemed a great restorative, as well as suitable for external application as a cosmetic well calculated to impart whiteness and freshness to the complexion.

Though Ben Jonson and Evelyn have extolled snails as a succulent dish, and in later days, Frank Buckland has recommended them to be eaten either boiled in milk, or raw after soaking for an hour in salt and water, Englishmen disposed to partake of "*Helix pomatia*" are nevertheless few in number.

"Snails," writes Muffet—"Health's Improvement," p. 190—are little esteemed of us in England; but in Barbarie, Spaine, and Italy, they are eaten as a most dainty, wholesome, nourishing, and restoring meat."

Our more epicurean neighbours are in no wise sharers of our prejudices respecting the gastronomic properties of snails. It need, therefore, excite no surprise to find in Francatelli's "Cook's Guide," a receipt for preparing a mucilaginous broth, whose efficacy is much extolled, compounded of chicken, calves' feet, and garden snails bruised in a mortar, to which balm, borage, and Iceland moss are added.

There is a story told of a shipwrecked French crew completely clearing some sea-side gardens in Devon of their snails, and few French restaurants of the present day are without a bowl of "*H. pomatia*" temptingly displayed in the windows.

Addison, in his travels, mentions having seen a snail-garden, or "*escargotière*," at the Capucins in Friburg, where was a square place boarded in and filled with a vast quantity of large snails, the floor being strewn about half a foot deep with several kinds of plants for them to nestle amongst in winter. When Lent arrived, the magazines were opened, and a "*ragoût*" made of the snails. Such snaileries have been in use for a length of time in various parts of Europe. Sometimes they consist of a cask covered with a net, into which the snails are put and kept until they are sufficiently fattened. In Lorraine, a corner of the garden surrounded by fine trellis work to prevent their escaping, is frequently assigned to them, and vegetables of various kinds are placed within for their sustenance.

In the neighbourhood of Dijon, where as much as three hundred pounds per annum has been made from snails, the vine growers keep them in dry cellars, or else digging a trench in the vine slopes, place at the bottom some leaves, and then their snails, which are then covered with more leaves, and a few spades full of earth. More than ten millions of snails are said to be sent away from the "*escargotières*" of Ulm, to different gardens to fatten, and when ready for table, forwarded to various convents in Austria for consumption during Lent.

Vine snails are forwarded, at the rate of five francs per hundred, from Troyes to Paris, where the value of these mollusks annually consumed is estimated to exceed half a million francs; they are not, however, considered in season until the first frost, about the end of October or early November, when they are closed with their white epiphragm.

Snails form no inconsiderable item in the bill of fare of gipsies; but when first gathered it is necessary to starve them for a few days, inasmuch as they feed upon poisonous plants such as the poppy and deadly nightshade, besides being much addicted to many injurious kinds of fungi. Sir George Head—"Tour in Modern Rome," p. 298—tells us that though all the time he lived in Rome, he never saw snails brought to table, they were sold in the open street in the same manner as were frogs. "They were purchased almost exclusively by the poorer classes, and in appearance resembled the common English garden snail; they afforded a curious spectacle in marking the extraordinary contrast between the natural slowness of the animal and the very uncommon nimbleness that appears among a multitude, when a quantity equal to the contents of a bushel basket or so are thus collected together. For myriads of tiny black eyes, no bigger than small pins' heads, are continually appearing and disappearing, popping in and out in the twinkling of an eye, and the whole surface of snails above is 'lifted up and let down again by the motion of those beneath, while the proprietor is obliged to exert his utmost vigilance and dexterity in order to restrain their incessant efforts to crawl over the edge of the basket and escape."

Not only, however, are the "*Helicidæ*" nutritious to the human species, but birds also are great consumers, crushing their shells and extricating their juicy bodies; and it is to the thousands of snails which

are eaten by the sheep that pasture on the downs, where, after a shower of rain, such myriads of snails appear, that the flavour of Southdown mutton owes much of its great celebrity.

A hundred years ago, Borlase, writing of Cornish mutton, declared that "the sweetest is that of the small sheep which feed on the commons where the sands are scarce, covered with green sod, and the grass is exceedingly short. From these sands come forth snails of the turbinated kind, which spread themselves over the plains and yield a most fattening nourishment to the sheep." Montague observes that "snails so abound on the short grass above Whitsand Bay, that it is impossible that animals should browse without devouring a prodigious quantity of them, especially by night, when they ascend the stunted blades."

Nothing is more remarkable than the vitality of some species of snails. Pond-snails have been frequently found alive in logs of mahogany from Honduras, and specimens belonging to the collection of a gentleman in Dublin, after having been dried for a period of fifteen years, nevertheless revived when placed in water. We are told that workmen employed in the construction of the Erie Canal, in the State of New York, found several hundred live mollusks at a depth of forty feet. Professor Morse records that he has seen certain species frozen in solid blocks of ice, which have afterwards regained their activity. Madeira snails, imprisoned closely in pill-boxes for two years and a half, have nevertheless survived; and a desert-snail from Egypt fixed to a tablet in the British Museum, twenty-fifth March, 1846, being immersed in tepid water, marvellously but completely recovered after an interval of four years. The vitality of snails' eggs likewise passes belief. Even if desiccated in a furnace until reduced to a minuteness barely visible, they will always regain their original bulk when damped, and the young will be brought forth as successfully as though the eggs had never been interfered with. Nor has cold any injurious effect upon them, for they may be frozen into ice for any length of time, and yet, when the ice has melted, will be found to be wholly uninjured.

As winter comes on, the snail becomes sensible of the approach of resistless lassitude, scoops a hole in the ground, lines and covers the chamber with a kind of mortar made of dead leaves and slime, and, retiring within this cell, pro-

ceeds to make itself still more snug by closing the mouth of its shell with a diaphragm which gradually hardens, but is minutely perforated opposite the respiratory orifice. As the animal withdraws further into his shell, other slime plates are made, which act on the principle of double windows, enclosing a layer of air between each pair, and so effectually protecting him from the cold. With the return of the spring, when the woods are melodious with the songs of birds intent on the perpetuation of their species, the snail reappears, and sets about making a nest-like hole in the ground, wherein its eggs, a cluster of from thirty to fifty—in form resembling the berries of mistletoe—are by-and-by laid. They are hatched in perhaps twenty days, when the young one emerge in a lovely bubble-like shell, and acquire full growth in about twelve months.

The snail's commonest mode of progression is crawling, the under side of its body forming a broad, muscular foot, by the expansion and contraction of which the animal is enabled to glide; and it is this creeping motion on the window-pane, to which the creature is held tightly by atmospheric pressure, which, when heard in the stillness of the night watches, sometimes disturbs so mysteriously the slumbers of the occupant of a room.

Snails are for the most part vegetarians, and our rows of peas and beds of strawberries often suffer severely in consequence, though as long as the weather is dry, a border of sawdust or ashes is an adequate protection, inasmuch as in their endeavours to pass over it, they become so entangled in the particles adhering to their slimy bodies, that they exhaust themselves in vain efforts to get free. But Mr. Jeffreys would have us know that it is really in default of something better provided for him that the snail has acquired so injurious a reputation as the foe of garden-stuff, and assures us that a pet specimen always "preferred roast mutton to lettuce leaves." Lisber, too, asserts that snails will eat not only such homely fare as bread and cheese, but likewise flesh of all kinds, particularly fish and salted meat. M. Moquier Tandon tells us further that "*les mollusques ont des ruses et des industries, des guerres acharnées et des amours bizarres.*" The snail is, in fact, a very model lover. He will spend hours at a time out of his brief span of seven or eight years' existence in paying attentions the most assiduous to

the object of his affections; and Mr. Jeffreys informs us further that snails are provided with Cupid's darts, in that they are possessed of tiny crystalline javelins which, after certain preliminary coquettings, they discharge at one another. These singular proofs of affection have been occasionally observed sticking in the bodies of snails after such conflicts. They are contained in a pouch, and vary in number. In some species each individual has but one such missile, in others two, and a few varieties have none at all. And yet when love-making is not in question, the snail is by no means sociable, although M. Tandon has observed in one branch of the family, snails engaged in mutually polishing a neighbour's shell with the foot, the last part of the body, by-the-way, to be withdrawn into the shell, and which secretes a fluid which lubricates its path, and which, when spun into a mucous thread, enables certain species to poise themselves in mid-air. While water-snails have but one pair, land-snails are supplied with two pairs of tentacles, or horns, at the extremity, and sometimes at the base of the longer pair of which, the eyes of the animals are placed, while the shorter pair are only feelers. The mouth is provided with a crescent-shaped jaw and minute palate-teeth, which present some curious varieties of structure.

It is in the possession of a shell that the main difference between the snail and the slug lies; but, as a connecting link between the two, there is an intermediate family—the "Testacellæ"—who carry on their tails an ear-shaped shell, somewhat resembling a finger-nail. "Testacella" possesses essential characteristics of his own, and is indeed a very tiger among mollusks, his teeth being arranged in fifty rows. He is a ground slug of strictly carnivorous habits, penetrating the soil to a depth of two or three feet, and preying voraciously upon earthworms. Wrapped in a gelatinous white mantle, which stows away beneath the shell, but is capable of extension over the whole body, "Testacella" lies "with his martial cloak around him," awaiting the advent of his prey, which he pursues with equal cunning and ferocity through the labyrinth of its subterranean galleries. Stealthily, and with an air of most supreme indifference, he approaches the side of his intended victim; but suddenly turning, as the wretched worm wriggles right and left, he lifts his head, dilates his mouth, and with sharp shark-formed teeth fastens upon his prey, whose

struggles are all in vain, and serve but to hasten its passage into the stomach of a voracious enemy.

In times mediæval the shell of "the hero who carries his house on his back," as Hesiod calls the snail, acquired high rank among the numerous amulets which were supposed to ward off from the body evil influences, and impart health and vigour. In Scotland and the North of England fortunes are sometimes told by the agency of snails; if, for instance, on leaving your house, you see a black snail, it should be promptly thrown over the left shoulder, when you may go on your way rejoicing; but if, on the other hand, you should fling the creature over the right shoulder, then be assured it is no primrose path which lies before you. In Carmarthenshire lands are said to have been gambled away by means of snail races; the rival steeds being placed at the foot of a post, victory and land were won for its owner by the fortunate mollusk who should first gain the top. In conclusion, may be cited an old English proverb, no less appreciable perhaps in the Victorian era than in the remoter days when it was first contributed to our collection of wit and wisdom:

Good wives to snails should be akin,
Always to keep their homes within.
Yet unlike snails they should not pack
All they are worth upon their back.

AMONG THE LAVENDER.

IN THREE CHAPTERS. CHAPTER III.

I WAS never at any hour of my life the very least in love with Margaret Ruthven. Love is assuredly a mighty power in life; but it is not the only mighty influence in life, as some people seem to think; not the only emotion of the human heart that is the motive-power in many a drama, full to the brim of pathos, of joy and pain, and afterwards of sweet remembrance. Had I never known Malcolm and Margaret Ruthven, I should never have become the man I have grown to be since. Those days at Orchard Farm were the making of me. The higher side of my nature widened and developed; the lower, self-loving half of me dwindled. I began to think of my work differently. Neither reputation as a writer, nor yet gain in pocket, appeared any more as an object worth striving for, except subordinately. I wanted my work to be smitten through and through with deeper

truth, so as to touch and hold the hearts of men.

I had never before enjoyed the close companionship of a really cultured woman. Pretty women, clever women, good women, women who were not good—all these I had encountered in the past, and fallen more or less under the charm of this one or that. But I had never known of what tender, many-sided beauty the mind of a woman is capable—a woman chastened of sorrow, taught of Heaven, supreme in the power of a ready and perfect sympathy.

Margaret Ruthven was all these things and more, and yet so utterly without self-consciousness that one could often trace in her a gentle surprise at the weight of her own words. The way in which the beautiful, sightless face of her husband turned to her, followed her with a blind instinct of her whereabouts, the smile that dawned round his mouth, lighting up his whole being, as it were, at the sound of her footsteps—the ways in which she was eyes to him, hands to him, feet to him—

It all remains with me, lingers about me like the memory of sweet music—like some grand psalm, known by heart, of which the last line should run: "Love stronger than death."

And I always think of Margaret Ruthven as "among the lavender," as if the mingled sweetness and unpretentiousness of the flower made her truest emblem. Even now, years after that visit to the quiet Midland nook beside the river, if I come suddenly upon a grove of blue-grey spear-like blossoms rising from blue-green leaves, I think of Orchard Farm, the fine, still rain falling in the warm summer's night and bringing out the perfume of the flowers beneath its gentle dews; or the stately form of Margaret standing at the gateway, by the great lavender bush, with the grey-blue blossoms at her belt.

It was not an easy task to make those two—husband and wife—speak of themselves. Of Nature, in every aspect; of art; of books—those best companions—on all such topics both were fluent. Mrs. Ruthven would read aloud by the hour. The great minds that have given their great store of thoughts to men kept company with us day by day. But of the individual lives and experience of my host and hostess I learnt little, until, indeed, the last evening of my holiday.

A sadness was over us all; on me, perhaps, it lay the deepest. They always had

each other; I had only companied with them a little while in their fair land of Beulah. I must go out into the turmoil and strife once more. To add to the depression, of which we were evidently all the victims, Malcolm Ruthven was in suffering—had been hardly able to bear a touch of light upon his eyes all day; had so suffered, that even the sound of the beloved voice reading to him would have been too much.

"Take my wife out for an hour's walk down by the river! She sorrows over me too much when I am like this; more than is good for her. Cheer her up for me, there's a good fellow."

By which speech it will be seen that our intimacy had ripened at a fine pace during the three weeks of my holiday, and that we understood each other very thoroughly.

An hour later we set off—pale, tired, anxious Margaret, and her lodger.

Her husband's words had struck me not a little:

"When I am like this. . . ."

He was, then, often like that; often in pain, in weariness; forced to abide in the darkness that could alone heal. With these thoughts in my heart, I paced slowly along in silence by the side of the woman whose simple grey bonnet framed her white patient face, as the calyx frames the flower; and then—I hardly know how, but all at once—as the result, I imagine, of some impulsive hot words of sympathy on my part, we seemed to be all at once plunged "in medias res," and the story of two lives was unfolded before me as a book might open. . . .

"When I first knew him years ago, he was such a beautiful, bright creature, lithe and active, full of life, and hope, and fervour. It seemed to him so easy and so certain to do great things in the world. He was just called to the Bar. Singularly without near relatives; but the very happiest, sunniest, brightest-hearted creature you can well think of. We soon became great friends, and he used to chatter to me of all his hopes, his castle-building, his noble, chivalrous ideas—somewhat Utopian I fear me—of how he should be ever the defender of the weak, the wronged, the oppressed. I was so much the elder, that it seemed natural and quite possible to be—friends, and nothing more—"

So far, Margaret got in her history, when I broke in:

"And then—he fell in love with you?"

She shook her head.

"No, that expression won't fit—it is too rash, too unadvised, too sudden. Say 'he grew to love me,' that suits the case better. He did not mean it; I am sure—" then after a pause, "neither did I."

"He could not help it." I spoke with a conviction that defied contradiction.

So she let me have my way.

A faint flush like the delicate pink that lines the sea-shell rose to her cheeks, seeming to smooth out the lines of care and thought, and to give her back the gift of youth for the moment.

"I suppose not; neither could I; but, for all that when he told me—when he asked me to be his wife, I said, it could not be."

"You trampled on your own heart—and his?"

"Yes," she said, quietly. "Three times over—and then—he went." Then came a heavy, long-drawn sigh.

I expect that had been a bad time to live through.

"I told him that the difference was too great; that time would bring it out. That for him to marry me would be a mistake."

"He did not believe you."

"No, not at the time; but he might have come to do so. I was right to decide as I did."

"Perhaps you were."

I had to make this admission because she was so true herself you could not even equivocate to her; but I made it unwillingly.

"But then, you see, things changed. Mr. Allardyce, you have been so good to us; you have grown so dear to both of us; you seem so like an old, old friend that I should like to tell you the rest; but it is so hard to tell."

I kept silence; I knew that, just then, any words would hurt her more than none.

"Some time after, when he and I seemed to have drifted quite apart, I met a man who knew him, and he told me—what you have seen."

"That Ruthven was blind?"

"Yes, that no one quite understood the case—they don't now, you know—he had these terrible attacks of pain, and gradually his sight went; first, it grew misty, then more dim, then dark. It was terrible to me to hear it. It seemed too piteous to be borne. But none of us can do other than lie down under the inevit-

able—fighting is no use. I thought over it all, prayed, wrestled with myself, and then—I—went to him."

Once more the warm colour rose to the very ripples of her hair. Deeper this time was that rosy flood of beautiful shame than before. We were both silent a while. The river, glinting in the evening sunshine, was smooth as glass in the still air; the tall spears of the purple loose-strife, mirrored in the water, scarcely stirred—the current was so still. Now and then a bandy-coot slid out from the osiers, and darted across to the reeds on the opposite bank, or a red-brown water-rat set sail from his hole on one bank, to that of a friend on the other. A thrush laughed in the trees, and a nimble little cole-tit ran twittering up the bole of a willow.

How fair, how beautiful it all was—in such strange contrast to the blighted, broken life of the man whose story I had just heard! It was my companion who broke the long silence:

"So, after all, ours was what we call here an 'Ann Hathaway courtship.' You see, in the Midlands, where every flower and old custom seems culled from Shakespeare's pages—which is another way of saying that his hand gathered and set them there—every one is familiar with his life and sayings, so I may say that, like him, my theory and my practice are at variance. He said the woman should 'take an elder than herself;' yet married Ann Hathaway. I said the same—yet married Malcolm after all. Well, well,"—this with a passing sweet smile—"though my hair is turning so white, to him it is always the same. It feels the same to his hand now, as the first time he ever smoothed it down—it will always seem the same; and, indeed, he will not believe me when I tell him it is lined so thick with grey."

We wandered long by the river, and through the wood, talking of all things in heaven and earth, so that when we reached the farm the gloaming had fallen like a veil over everything, and a faint mist, snow-white, stretched out the course of the river.

There at the gate stood Malcolm.

"I heard your footsteps ever so far off," he said smiling. "I am like the bats—fond of the gloaming, you see," he added, turning to me with a soft laugh, "it suits my eyes."

Then we all three went in together;

but he took my arm this once, because I was going in the morning. So the long, white hand, with its blood-red ring, lay against my sleeve, and somehow, on my long journey next day the meaning of it haunted me.

After all we are very like straws or fallen leaves on a river—drifted here and there by the wind and stream of circumstances.

I wrote to my good friends at Orchard Farm; they, or rather Margaret, wrote to me. The influence of her pure, sweet nature left me not—showing itself in deeper earnestness of life, in higher aim of life. We even planned—in writing—another holiday for me “among the lavender,” when the summer should come again.

And then family affairs of my own took me abroad. I travelled far, and from place to place. My name and fame as a writer were growing everywhere. I had a warm welcome; and so came spring and grew to summer, and summer ripened to autumn, and faded again to winter, and still I was a wanderer. But with summer, like the swallows, I came back to England—to the hum, and stir, and dear delightful sense of life that only London gives one.

My sister was at my rooms to greet me, and had all things fair and sweet set out to welcome me.

“I am so glad you like the lavender, dear,” she said, “I bought it of a poor, tired-looking girl in the street to-day. I bought all she had.”

There it stood, a miniature grove of blue-grey spears, set in a wide china bowl, and its faint, pungent scent filled all the room.

“Why, Stevie,” said my sister, suddenly, “how strange you look! After all, perhaps you don’t like the smell of lavender?”

I did not answer.

I was sitting before a pile of letters, proofs—what not?—all waiting to be opened; and there, among the rest, I saw a small, square parcel like a box, directed to me in a dear, familiar hand. It had been registered, and the date on the stamp was that of three months back. I cut the string. My fingers trembled. The perfume of the lavender had taken my thoughts back to Orchard Farm; and now, what was this little packet that perchance smelt of lavender too?

I opened it—almost dropped it—uttered an exclamation under my breath—felt

as though some cold hand touched my heart.

Before me lay a ring with one blood-red stone; beneath it, a scrap of paper; written there, these words:

“I send you this in memory of him—
M. R.”

Not another word.

The next evening, just at sundown, I reached Orchard Farm.

The lavender was all a-bloom by the gate, the casement set wide, as it was wont to be.

But my heart felt like lead in my bosom, for a strange dog barked wildly at me as I lifted the latch, and a gruff voice asked me what I wanted, while a dreadful-looking old crone came hobbling to the door in answer to my knock.

Which of us has not known the agony of visiting some dear-loved spot, to find all its surroundings changed to discord?

Bad as I had imagined things might be, the reality exceeded my worst forebodings.

“What may be your business?” said the hag, whose rusty bonnet sat on end on her shaggy head.

“Has Mrs. Ruthven left the Farm?” I said, in as steady a voice as I could command. “Her husband—died” (how the words seemed to choke me); “but—can you tell me where she—what has—”

Here my eloquence came to an end.

“Oh yes,” chimed in the old woman, in a querulous voice, “her good gentleman died. I helped to clean up after the funeral. He was sick a long while, and they had a doctor from Lunnun. But it weren’t no good, bless you! He just went off and knowed nobody for days and days, and she a-standing by him, dumb like, strokin’ of his ’and.”

“Yes, yes,” I said; “but after that—what of her—what of his wife?”

“Oh—she was never much to reckon on—she wasn’t. She looked like a ghost, as the sayin’ is, ever after he was took; and she just died.”

“Died!”

I really think I must have shouted that one word—so strangely the old crone looked at me.

“Ay—all of a suddint; settin’ by the chair as he’d used to be in. Died—why of course she died; just six weeks after ’im. Didn’t they send for me to streak her out, and didn’t I see her in her coffin? She looked like a picter in wax, for all the blessed world; and she’s buried along

o' him—as you may see for yoursel' if you go down——”

But I heard no more.

I dropped a sovereign into the shrivelled hand of the amazed old creature, and hurried out of the sound of her voice.

But not before I had hastily gathered a spray or two of lavender to lay upon the grave where Margaret and her husband slept.

They had passed away out of my life; but the radiance they had made for me would endure—ay, and has endured.

Sad at heart, lonely for those “gone before,” I could yet be glad and infinitely thankful at heart for the dear memory of that holiday among the lavender. Years have passed, and I am thankful for it still.

OLD CUSTOMS AT THE GILD-HALLS.

THIS may not be an unfavourable moment to call to mind some of the ancient and in many cases obsolete customs of the Guild Hall, and of the “Twelve great Companies” connected with it.

A strong arm as well as a thoughtful brain was requisite among the citizens of these Companies when in their infancy. The accounts given of the conflicts for precedence between the Merchant Tailors and the Skinners in particular, vie in interest with that celebrated “street-row” in Elinburgh, so graphically described in “The Abbot.” Both were established in the coronation year of Edward the Third, so the dispute could not be settled by point of date; and though the tailors might claim that through them the world at large was clothed, their rivals could point to the ermine on the robe of the Monarch and the Judge, the fur-cloak of the Peer and the scholar as being supplied by them; not foreseeing the day when the produce of their industry would be little used, save as wrappings for the chilly among the gentler sex.

Sir John Hawkwood, “the first General of modern times,” was, as we read, a tailor by profession, but he “turned his needle into a sword, and beat his thimble into a shield,” and used both with such success that he was later knighted by Edward the Third. The unseemly strife, before alluded to, was terminated by “peace-preserving Boddington,” Lord Mayor, during the reign of Richard the Third, who ordained

that the two great Companies should enjoy priority of place in turn, which custom is still observed.

A kindred Company, that of the Clothworkers, turned the superfluous energies of the citizens into a more becoming channel. We find Sir John Robertson, Mayor, under Charles the Second, again encouraging the pageants suppressed during the Commonwealth, and promoting the “true English and manlike exercise of wrestling, archery, sword, and dagger.”

This Company had the honour of counting a crowned head among its members.

“Wilt thou make me free of the Clothworkers?” asked James the First, after dining in the great hall in Mincing Lane.

“Ay, and think myself a happy man to see this day,” replied the proud Mayor.

That roystering Monarch, his grandson, was feasted with more zeal than decorum by Sir Robert Viner, a subsequent Mayor, as Addison tells, and grew so exuberant with loyalty, devotion, and good wine, that the King thought it best to leave the hall quietly without the final draught from the loving-cup. He was, however, seized upon by Viner, who cried out: “Sir, you shall stay yet for another bottle,” on which the merry Monarch looking graciously at him complied, quoting with his accustomed humour: “He that is drunk is as great as a King.”

The Loving-cup was a great feature at these City banquets. Pepys, in the time referred to, gave a goblet to serve for this purpose to the Clothworkers, of whom he was Master, and this is still carefully preserved among them. Camden, the antiquary, presented another to the Painters-Stainers. Sir Martin Bowes bequeathed one of gold, honoured by the touch of Elizabeth at her coronation, to the Goldsmiths. The Barbers-Surgeons possess two, which are Royal gifts—one from the hand of Charles the Second, garlanded with appropriate acorns and oak-leaves; another from bluff King Hal, fringed with a merry chime of golden bells.

The practice was for the cup of spiced wine to be handed round at the conclusion of the feast. Poison, that skeleton of so many banquets, was effectually guarded against by the host and his Wardens first taking a draught. Each must hold the bowl in his right hand, while in the other is the napkin with which he will presently touch the tip of the bowl. The loving-cup ought, by rights, to be provided with a cover,

which the person who is next to drink the pledge should hold, meanwhile, in his "dagger hand" to show that he has no evil designs on the life of his friend.

This precaution is supposed to date from the time of the murder of the young Saxon King, Edward the Martyr. He, while drinking the stirrup-cup at the gates of the Castle of Corfe, was stabbed by order of his step-mother, Elfrida, whose many crimes make a dark page in early English history.

We read that Ethelfloeda the Fair, mother of the murdered boy, was daughter to Ordwar, an Alderman of London, while the guilty Elfrida was, before her marriage with King Edgar, wife to Ehelwald, the "glorious Alderman of the East Angles." At that time the honourable title applied to those who stood next in dignity to the King.

Another custom grown obsolete since days more dainty have set in, was for the Fool, an important member of the Mayor's household, to leap fully dressed into a gigantic bowl of custard. In reference to this, rare Ben Jonson tells us that the said Fool: "Takes his almain leap into a custard, and makes my Lady Mayoress and her sisters laugh all their hoods over their shoulders."

As chief butler to the Sovereign, a post which he has held since the time of Richard the Third, the Mayor receives at the coronation a golden goblet and cover. A silver cradle used to be presented to the wife of the dignitary at the same time; but this is discontinued. The Mayor, no less generous, was wont to present to each of his guests at a certain annual feast, a piece of plate known as "the noble spoon." This was later replaced by a ladle made of horn.

A massive piece of plate, The Salt, formed at the City feasts, as in others, the line of division between inferior guests and those the hosts delighted to honour. Small-minded spite was at times indulged by bidding one take a lower place who might rightly have aspired to a higher one, on which swords, quick to resent a slight, would be drawn, and blood would flow. The Company of the Salters, with their motto: "Sal sapit omnia," was chartered by Edward the Third. A "sylver-guylte salte" was a frequent gift to the warden of a guild, and a mournful, Egyptian-feast element was introduced at the board by the words which accompanied the offering: "Thou be mercifull unto his soul."

In Froissart's spirited account of the

progress of Henry the Fourth through the City, escorted by the Companies, we are told that in Chepe were seven fountains running with red and white wine. Wonder at this lavishness is lessened when we learn that the "Marchant fruiterers of Gascoyne" supplied wine from Bordeaux at fourpence the gallon, while that from the Rhine might be had for sixpence.

To neither of these liquors would the glowing title of "Sun of the Night," given to the juice of the grape by the eloquent Danish poet, appear to be suited; but they must have seemed luscious beverages to the palate of the apprentice accustomed to that made from the fruit of his own island. In the present day we have heard of a nobleman who, not content with the generous growth of slate in his domains, attempted to re-introduce there the culture of the grape which had been profitable on the same spot five hundred years before. But as the modern chronicles said, it was found to require three men to drink a cup of his lordship's wine; one presented his unwilling throat, a second stood near to hold his struggling form when repentance set in, and a third handed him a munch of bread that he might afterwards eat away the acrid taste.

The Vintners preserve, among other ancient privileges, the right to keep swans upon the Thames. Once a year the Royal swan-herd performs his voyage up the river, when the birds are marked with two nicks in the form of a V, the initial letter of the company. The sign of the "Swan with Two Necks"—that is, nicks—common over public-houses in some parts of the country, is a corruption of the phrase referring to this practice. A procession in state barges, vying in splendour with that for the Wedding of the Adriatic, was once an annual festivity, and "Cobs," and "Plus," to the number of five hundred were often marked, while the swan-herd looked on with a plume of the snowy feathers in his cap. Now that the swan no longer forms the chief item of the City feasts, the number has been allowed to diminish, and from the dawn to the even of his life, they leave the "stately sailing swan" to "give out his snowy plumage to the gale, and arching proud his neck, with oary feet, bear forward fierce and guard his osier isle, protective of his young."

The Dean and Canons of Norwich, likewise, have a right to keep the Royal bird at the expense of their city. According to them, when cooked with fruity port and

other condiments, the cygnet is not a dish to be despised, though they might not say with Chaucer's *bon vivant*: "A fat swan loved he best of any roast."

"The Ostrich buoyant on the wing," is the favoured bird of another of the City Companies, that of the Ironmongers. Him they place with the salamander on their arms, from the old belief that he had power to digest iron. Quarles is fond of alluding to the feats of the desert racer, and Lovelace addresses him as follows:

Ostrich! thou feathered fool and easy prey,

That larger sails to thy broad vessel need'st,
Snakes through thy gutter-neck hiss all the day,
Then on thy iron mess at supper feed'st.

Which would be useful information to the young naturalist, only that the ostrich is no fool, and was never known to thrust his head in any sands, save those of travellers' tales; that he is a prey so easy that it takes only three of the best mounted Arabs of the desert to hope to catch him, and they resign themselves to failure the day before the hunt takes place; while Rider Haggard in "Jess" has told us how good a natural weapon is the bird's stout, swift leg, and how well it recompenses him for the want of larger sails.

The Cordwainers, with whom are associated the Cobblers, contributed their item to the formation of the typical English Sunday, when they prayed Richard the Second to ordain that, "Every cordwainer that shod any man or woman on the Sunday might be called on to pay the somme of thirty shillings."

We find the name Shakespeare as that of some party interested, on one of the earliest of the charters of the Cordwainers, who had been first incorporated in 1410, a hundred and fifty years before the birth of the poet.

The Bricklayers preserve in their cists the copy of a deed by which they had a right to claim one farthing per thousand on bricks made within a certain distance from the City. Up to considerably less than three hundred years ago, the Lord Mayor, Wardens, and Aldermen, "made their mark" upon all such documents, their hands being still too unused to the pen to permit of their writing their names.

The Artillery Company of the City of London—representatives of the ancient Train-bands, and formerly known as the Archers of Finsbury—once played an important part in all state pageants. An old print from a painting representing the

procession of Edward the Sixth to the Tower, in the possession of Lord Montague, and preserved at Cowdray, gives them an important place; and in that of Queen Anne, to St. Paul's, the Bands line the streets from Temple Bar to the Cathedral. They were called out for the protection of the Bank of England in 1780, when we read that the heavy, leaden inkstands of the clerks were melted into rifle-bullets. Clarendon, an unimpeachable authority on this subject, tells us of their stout resistance to Rupert the Red, who "himself led up the choice horse to charge them, but could make no impression upon their stand of pikes."

The Civic Volunteers are first mentioned as the Guild of St. George, in the reign of Edward the First. In the year of the Spanish Invasion, whose tercentenary we are celebrating this year, their numbers were greatly increased, and, had the necessity been forced upon them, we should have heard of them at Tilbury, where they were stationed. In these ultra-constitutional days it is of interest to call to mind that the Artillery Company is under the direct control of the Sovereign, and not that of the Parliament. The Prince Consort was their Colonel, for some years before his death. It may also be mentioned that the Corporation of London was specially exempted—not, however, without considerable opposition—from the Parliamentary reforms of 1833, though the Reform Bill of the preceding year gave them the right of sending four new members to the House. Sir Robert Peel's Police Force, established in 1829, have considerably lessened the sphere of usefulness of the variously-named Train-bands. A curious allusion to olden times is to be seen in the Church of St. Mary-le-Bow, the proud possessor of Bow Bells. Here the family of Edward the Third used to be seated to watch the Civic processions. The modern building, erected by Wren after the Great Fire, has a small balcony placed over the west door in commemoration of this practice.

From this window Queen Anne witnessed the pageants in honour of the coronation. Beneath it passed the procession represented by Hogarth in his "Industry and Idleness," and so coveted was the honour of beholding these, that the landlords and residents in the houses of Chepe had only a right to look on from their own casements if a clause to this effect had been specially inserted in the lease.

Old Bow Church, which dated from the Conquest, contained a memorial to Sir John Coventry, Lord Mayor in 1425. The epitaph thereon is given by Wever in his "Funeral Monuments," published 1631. Some score of years before we read that "The Lord Mayor's Shows, long left off, were now again revived by order of the King," and they have continued since, with few interruptions, to delight the populace until the present day.

THE TROTH OF ODIN.

By C. GRANT FURLEY.

A STORY IN THIRTEEN CHAPTERS.

CHAPTER VI.

It is easy to bid farewell to one's mother and swear to hold oneself absolved from the duties of kinship; easy, at least, in comparison with the task of carrying out the threats implied in these assertions. Gaspard Harache loved Thora Sweynson; but he had the life-long habit of loving his mother and sisters, and it was difficult for him to choose between the two affections. Like most men, he wanted all, and had not courage to decide to which he would adhere—not even to see that a choice must be made. He could not desert Thora, that was out of the question, as a matter equally of love and honour. Yet, the thought of quarrelling with his mother was so bitter, that, by way of consolation, he told himself that it was impossible the alienation could be permanent; and since he would not yield to her wishes, he made himself believe that, in the end, she must give in to his.

Meanwhile, of course, he must keep up a firm front, and seem far more immovable than he felt. He established himself with Thora in a lodging not far from Monsieur Meudon's dockyard, and made up his mind to have no communication with his family for a week or two. If they would not accept him with his wife he would have nothing to do with them, and he was so determined in his resolve that he even avoided going through the street where his mother lived, when accident or business brought him near it. But he thought that his course of action need not be persisted in for more than a few days—Madame Harache would be forced to capitulate. He knew how bitter the pain of this separation was to him, and, going on a usually safe principle—that parents love their children

better than children love their parents—he guessed that it could not be less for her. And he had right on his side, he knew that; and he would not think so ill of his mother as to think that, after the first bitterness of having her own plans defeated was past, she would continue to treat an innocent girl as if she had been guilty of a sin. Justice and the sacredness of a woman's purity must conquer her at last.

Three days after his return he received a letter from Madame Harache, addressed to him at the dockyard, in which she asked him to come and see her and his sisters that evening. He showed the note to Thora, who, partly out of jealousy, partly out of obstinacy, would have had him refuse the invitation. The girl had no comprehension of the relation she was supposed to bear to Gaspard. The idea of any disgrace attaching to her would have seemed at once horrible and incredible; but she was so ignorant of the world that the explanation he gave—that his other friends could not receive her till his mother did so, seemed to her, though stupid and unfortunate, not impossible. She understood, too, that in some fashion, Gaspard was dependent on his mother for money, and that in this way his marriage with her would injure him unless Madame Harache chose to accept her as a daughter. But she did not suspect for a moment that the Troth of Odin was not a true marriage ceremony, binding on both of them all over the world. Gaspard would have died sooner than have let her know this; he would have felt that he was insulting her if he had tried to explain it to her.

What she knew of Madame Harache, and what she misunderstood regarding her own circumstances, combined to make her hate her husband's mother. Her aim, like Gaspard's, was to bring her to acknowledge her as a daughter; her plan of campaign the same as his, but more determinedly fixed. She wished him to take no notice of his mother's letter.

"Why should you be at her beck and call?" she asked. "If she wants to see you let her come here."

Gaspard sighed; he could not explain why his mother would not cross his threshold. "You do not love my mother, Thora," he remarked, sadly.

"Has she given me the chance of doing so?" Thora retorted; and Gaspard was silenced.

"I think I ought to go to my mother when she asks me," he said, after a pause.

"I do the best I can for you by retaining her affection."

"I don't think so," she answered, and argued her point at some length; but Gaspard would not be convinced. He longed, more than he was consciously aware of, for the old sweetness of family love. It had been his life atmosphere; even Thora could not make up for the loss of it; and, moreover, he thought that his mother must be softening, or she would not have called him to her side.

Madame Harache was guilty of no such weakness. Her object was to win her son back, by degrees, to his old place in the family, to make him feel, as she guessed he soon would, that the "belle sauvage" could not compensate to him for all he must forfeit for her sake.

"My reason for asking you to come this evening," she explained, "was that your sisters were disappointed at seeing so little of you on the day of your return, and want to hear of your travels."

The explanation was given coldly and formally; but having given it, Madame Harache thawed to something like tenderness, and joined with Barbe and Lucie in questions and comments. Gaspard felt himself to be a traveller of no mean renown, and the surprise and delight expressed by his womenkind at his adventures, which were in truth of a very homely and harmless nature, was in itself a subtle flattery. Then the pleasant fluency of talk was more agreeable than he had expected as a change from a conversation "à deux," which his imperfect English and Thora's halting French confined strictly to interchange of love-words and common-places. Even the surroundings, once so familiar as to be unnoticed, the very way in which the coffee was served, made him perceive that the lodging where he now dwelt was very unhomelike—that Thora had not yet made it homelike. Poor Thora! with her Orcadian education, and her three day old acquaintance with France and French habits, it was hardly possible for her to do great things.

The moment Thora came into his thoughts Gaspard became conscious that they involved a certain disloyalty, and rose to go far sooner than he would have liked.

"But you will come back again soon," said Madame Harache, clasping his hand, and looking at him with a tender yearning on her hard face.

"As soon as you like, ma mère; if I may bring my wife with me," he answered,

gravely; "but I do not like to leave her alone."

Madame Harache's face gloomed over, and she let his hand drop. "Do not talk thus before your sisters," she exclaimed. "They are young and innocent girls."

"I have said nothing they should not hear," he answered. "I speak of a girl as innocent, and nearly as young as Barbe. May I not bring her with me to see you?"

"No," answered Madame Harache, coldly and abruptly.

"Then I cannot return," said Gaspard, gravely.

The two young girls who had heard this colloquy without understanding it, and had been wholly at a loss to comprehend the strange circumstances which had attended Gaspard's coming home, looked at each other in bewilderment.

"Why are you so grave, Gaspard?" asked Barbe, too curious to keep silence. "And why do you not live at home as you used to do?"

"That is a thing which our mother will explain to you if she thinks it right you should know, *petite cœur*," replied Gaspard, with a quiet reticence that astonished his mother. She was prepared to hear him burst into some romantic defence of his action that would win his sisters over to his side, and further complicate the family rebellion. It seemed strange to her that he should make no effort to lessen her daughters' allegiance to her, now that the opportunity was offered him; and his calm alarmed her more than his violence could have done; it showed more strength, more power of resistance, than she thought he possessed. One can contradict words; but silence is invincible, and it is a weapon that women dread.

She had as yet kept her trouble to herself, thinking that she would soon conquer Gaspard's determination, and lead him into the path she wanted him to tread. But after he had gone away this evening—perfectly fixed in his resolve not to return unless his wife came with him, though he parted affectionately from Barbe and Lucie, and courteously from herself—she began to long for a confidant and adviser. After the fashion of women, she liked to have a man approve of her actions even when she would have ignored his disapproval; and next day she went to Monsieur Meudon, and told him the whole story of Gaspard's folly and obstinacy.

Monsieur Meudon took it lightly, as a man of the world who had seen such

things before, and did not overrate their strength and permanence.

"C'est la jeunesse!" he said calmly. "One expects a young man to have his follies. Indeed, I am well pleased that he should sow his wild oats before he marries my daughter; he will make the better husband afterwards."

"Alas!" answered Madame Harache, "this seems to be a crop which he is determined to reap as well as to sow."

"Madame," her adviser assured her politely, "I cannot believe that the son of a lady so eminently reasonable as yourself, will long display a folly so unworthy of his parentage. Gaspard is young—young enough to do many things of which he will repent. Well, my daughter also is young. Let us give up all thoughts of the marriage taking place till a year is past. By that time Gaspard will have tired of his fair barbarian, and will be only too glad of the loophole of escape offered him by your refusal to recognise his marriage with her; he will seize the opportunity of breaking his connection with her by marrying a young girl of position and fortune suitable to his own."

"I trust he will!" said Madame Harache, sighing rather hopelessly.

"Meanwhile, so long as his infatuation lasts," Monsieur Meudon went on, "treat him gently, and let him fancy that you are acceding to his wishes. Do not definitely refuse a demand which assuredly you will never definitely grant, lest in anger and impatience he should fulfil his threat of alienating himself entirely from you."

"I fear that he will not give me the opportunity of doing as you advise," answered Gaspard's mother. "He has said that he will not enter my house again unless I permit him to bring that girl with him."

"That is unfortunate; but there are other places. He has not vowed never to enter my house if I ask him to visit me; and a subordinate cannot, without a discourtesy which would be most inadvisable, refuse his employer's invitations. Also, he cannot expect me to receive this young person who, failing your consent, is not his wife. I will arrange that you shall see him, in a fashion that shall seem accidental. For the rest, I merely indicate the course of treatment which you should pursue; you, madame, will fill up the outline with more skill than I lay claim to. It is a matter which requires diplomacy, and diplomacy, as we all know, is a science in which women invariably surpass men."

Madame Harache felt that she must repay the compliment:

"I trust less to my own powers," she said, "than to the attractions of Mademoiselle Sophie. She is so good, so gentle, that I have no doubt Gaspard will soon regard her with an affection which will eradicate a foolish passion for a mere pretty face."

Madame Harache spoke in mere courtesy, believing very little in her own prediction, yet her words were in some degree prophetic.

Gaspard could not refuse to go to his employer's house, and he found his visits there increasingly pleasant. He had always liked Madame Rayer; the touch of originality about her was a refreshing variety from ordinary society, and though he began by taking little notice of Sophie Meudon, he ended by becoming interested in the quiet, plain, little girl, and seeking to be the means of lighting up her face with one of her rare, slow smiles.

Sophie did not say much—did not apparently do much to win his attention. She listened well; it was one of her talents; and Gaspard, like most young men, was fond of talking, especially now that his wanderings in foreign parts gave him a subject that was in some sort his own. Madame Rayer began questioning him about his travels, Sophie, who was busy with some embroidery, went on with her work for a minute or two, then gradually the stitches became slower. She paused to look at Gaspard, with the needle in her hand, and finally the work slipped from off her knee, and she remained listening to the young man. One would have said that she was absorbed in his words; but there was a certain force about the seemingly-passive attitude that compelled Gaspard to notice the absorption. He did so, and while it flattered him, it disturbed his fluency. He talked at random for a second or two, and was beginning to stammer, when Madame Rayer came to the rescue with a useful interruption.

She had observed her niece's little bit of comedy, and its effect on Gaspard, with considerable amusement; but as she was really interested in the young man's talk, the amusement became tempered with irritation, when the pantomime threatened to stop the flow of it.

"Sophie, you have let your embroidery fall," she said abruptly; "it will take you all your life to finish it if you are so idle."

Sophie sighed, picked up her work, and began to arrange her bright-hued silks.

She cast an appealing glance at Gaspard as she did so, which made him feel that perhaps Madame Reyer was a shade too severe in her management of her niece; and then as he returned the look, he could not but observe how pretty the girl's plump white hands looked as they disentangled the strands of silk. He tried to go on with what he had been saying, but after a few minutes the former pantomime was repeated, and Sophie was again looking and listening, as if she had forgotten everything in the world but Gaspard Harache and his words.

Again he became confused. This time he stopped of his own accord, with an apology for having talked so much; and asked if Mademoiselle Meudon would not give them some music. Sophie was a bad musician, and she knew it. But now she went to the piano without hesitation, and opening it, began to play. She executed a dozen bars or so of an indifferent piece in an indifferent fashion, then stopped abruptly.

"I cannot play to-night," she said, "I cannot attend to the notes; I am thinking of the places Monsieur Harache has been talking of. Will you not tell us more about these strange countries?" she added, turning to Gaspard.

"I fear I have already talked too much," he protested.

"Oh, no; it is so interesting. I always like to hear about foreign countries. At school the companion I liked best was an English girl; she lived in a town called—comment le dit-on?—Ar—Hartlepool. Perhaps Monsieur Harache has been there?"

Gaspard admitted that his journeyings had not led him to the town in question.

"It seems to be a very strange place, and the life the people lead—ah! que c'est drôle! I never tired of hearing my friend—her name is Elinor Mason—speak of her home; and I have promised to visit her there some day if papa and la tante Cathérine will permit it."

However discomposed Gaspard might be at the moment by the girl's interest in his narrative, it was full of subtle flattery which would not fail to win his interest and good-will. "These to hear did Desdemona seriously incline." How could Othello help loving her for it? Gaspard wondered as he went home why he had hitherto felt so little interest in Sophie Meudon, on the few occasions when they had met. He now found her most charming and amiable; not the sort of woman one loved, indeed—love was for beautiful women like Thora

—but with whom one could have a pleasant, friendly companionship. She was so intelligent, he thought; yet, be it observed, Sophie had not uttered a word that was not utterly commonplace. It was not by speech that she produced her effects.

Gaspard had spent a pleasant evening, and in this case there was no undercurrent of doubt or distrust to mar his satisfaction. Therefore a tired and sullen look on Thora's face, as it met him on reaching home, jarred upon his mood. He gave himself some credit for taking no notice of it, and began to tell her all, or nearly all, that had passed at Monsieur Meudon's. But Thora had been alone all day, as well as all the evening, and felt lonely and depressed, for she had no other companionship than her husband's. It was inevitable that he should go out every day to his work; but that made it the more incumbent on him to spend what time he could with her. It is true that, not being devoid of common sense, she had agreed that it was advisable for him to accept Monsieur Meudon's invitation. Still, he need not have enjoyed himself so much. But she was too proud to complain yet; and, trying to be patient, she seemed only indifferent, which surprised and wounded Gaspard a little.

He was often invited to go to Monsieur Meudon's after this, and as the weeks went on he took more pleasure in his visits to his employer's family. He began to feel the limits of Thora's companionship; and since he had forbidden himself all intercourse with his own people, he was the more grateful for this society, which resembled in some degree the home he had forfeited. At least, this was the explanation he gave himself when he analysed the matter at all. To Thora he merely said that he must keep on good terms with his employer; now that it was not likely that he would receive any help from his mother in his career, Monsieur Meudon's good graces were invaluable. She accepted the statement, though she disliked his frequent absences. But her objection was only the weariness of a lonely woman, not the distrust of a jealous one. She knew that there was a Mademoiselle Meudon; she had asked Gaspard how she looked, and other questions; but it never entered her mind to be jealous of her. She was Gaspard's wife, she never suspected that her claim to the title could be disputed; and she accepted the rights and duties which that name involved with the quiet, passionless fidelity of a

peasant woman who would never have a thought of being unfaithful to her husband though she has utterly ceased to love him, and expects, without ever thinking of the matter, the same unswerving truth from him. They were husband and wife, bound to each other for life; there could be no question of another love for either.

In one sense, she had no cause for jealousy. To the extent of his consciousness, Gaspard was faithful to his wife. Sophie Meudon was not the sort of woman to rouse in him the swift headlong passion he had felt for Thora Sweynson; but she could establish herself as a pleasant necessity in a man's life; and as his wife's temper became, for one reason and another, sullen and fretful, Gaspard found Sophie's society a restful change. Sometimes he could not help comparing the two, and the comparison made him sigh. Perhaps it was an unjust one, for their circumstances were very different. Had Sophie been the unacknowledged wife, standing lonely and friendless in a foreign land, ignored by her husband's kindred, full of unsatisfied longings, and disappointed in impossible hopes, her face might have been less bright, her manner less tenderly attentive. But when it is a question of the woman who conduces most to his comfort—a thing very dear to his heart—a man seldom considers how much or how little circumstances aid her to perform her part. A man's love—not his quickly-born, quickly-spent passion, but his steady-going, for-daily-use affection—is given, like the prize of a handicap race, to the runner who first reaches that winning-post, regardless of the fact that the competitor who comes second may have been placed far behind at the start, and have had a greater task to accomplish. Gaspard did not discuss this point with himself. He only knew that Sophie always welcomed him with a smiling face, and that Thora was exacting and irritable; but he would have said with firm conviction that he loved the one, and looked upon the other only as a friend.

Once Gaspard met his mother at Monsieur Meudon's. She was sitting talking to Madame Røyer in her outdoor garments, that her appearance might have an aspect of chance in the young man's eyes. Before long she rose to go, and when she had said good-bye to the others—bestowing a specially affectionate kiss on Sophie—she turned to Gaspard with a pathetic smile.

"Do I ask too much of you, my son," she said, "if I request you to walk home with me?"

"You confer a favour on me," he answered with a gravity that set the phrase far above mere compliment.

At first, however, they had not much to say to each other. Madame Harache spoke with affection of Sophie Meudon, and Gaspard agreed with her with evident sincerity. But no other subject of conversation arose till they were near Madame Harache's house.

"You do not often pass this way, Gaspard," she said then.

"No, not often."

"Can I never hope that you will again cross the threshold of the house where you were born?"

"You know the conditions on which alone I can do so."

Madame Harache sighed. "You ask such an impossible thing!" she exclaimed.

"Not impossible! I even venture to hope that some day my mother will regain her better self, and grant my wish."

"Cherish no such hope. And yet—would it indeed make you happy if I consented to your wishes?"

"It would," Gaspard replied to the question; but Madame Harache saw that his face did not brighten much.

"Well, who knows!" she answered. "Yet I promise nothing. But I have not yet found courage to register my disapproval of your marriage, since you call it a marriage. It is possible that I may never say the words that make it null. But do not hope too much; it is difficult for me to give up the desire to have Sophie Meudon for my daughter-in-law. She is so sweet; I could love her so much."

So Gaspard returned home feeling hopeful; but his hope was lacking in elation.

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On November the 15th

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